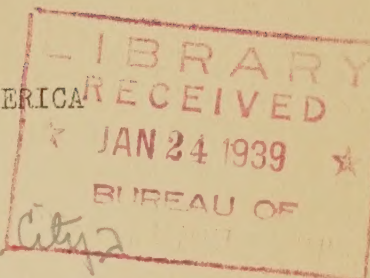


Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current
scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ADDRESS BEFORE THE DIRECTORS OF THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA
BYLee A. Strong, Chief
Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine
January 11, 1939

The opportunity to speak to the Directors of the Garden Club of America on plant quarantine and pest control matters is greatly appreciated. There has probably been no greater moving force in the development of horticulture in the United States than the membership of the garden clubs of America. My contacts up until this occasion have been pretty largely through correspondence and through occasional petitions received from garden club groups whenever any modification in any direction is suggested or made in Quarantine 37. Certainly the garden clubs should be and certainly they are interested in plant Quarantine 37 as well as other plant quarantines and pest control operations which have for their object the prevention of entry of pests or for the control and prevention of spread once they have entered. There has been a great deal of misinformation passed around about the actions of the Department with respect to Quarantine 37 and as a result of course there are many misunderstandings of the intentions of the Department, and by the same token, of the purposes and accomplishments of the quarantine.

When the quarantine was promulgated the principle was announced that to reduce the importations of foreign plants meant that there would be a corresponding reduction in the risk of importing plant pests. This is a tenable theory and sound principle if carried to a fair and logical conclusion. In carrying out the quarantine it was the practice for many years to deny entry entirely to any variety of plants which became through production in this country commercially available in such quantity as to meet the needs of the country. This resulted in the anomalous situation of having one named variety of rose coming in in whatever quantities were desired, whereas another named variety of rose from exactly the same producing firm abroad raised under exactly the same conditions and presenting exactly the same pest considerations, was refused entry because of its availability in this country. I submit that no fair and just and logical quarantine should bring about and continue any such condition as that.

A further anomalous situation has been continued with respect to bulbs. The narcissus bulb producers in this country who went into the production of narcissus to meet a demand to be created by the enforcement of restrictions on narcissus under Quarantine 37 have been able to successfully produce narcissus and, so far as I know, to successfully market them. However, they do not want competition from abroad. They have made one plea after another that the narcissus bulbs from abroad be kept out on account of infestation by nematodes. It is very questionable whether the nematode infestation in Europe in narcissus bulbs exceeds in any degree the infestation of narcissus bulbs in this country. However, this demand has been constant, consistent and insistent. When narcissus bulbs were accorded unlimited entry as to number some two or three years ago the narcissus growers in this country insisted that the narcissus bulbs from abroad be sterilized. This was for

the ostensible purpose of preventing the entry of nematodes into this country but it had, in addition to that feature, a feature desirable to the narcissus growers in that it rendered imported narcissus bulbs unfit for forcing purposes. In this way there was provided almost as effective an instrument as an embargo would be.

It was suggested to the bulb growers that inasmuch as hyacinths carried exactly the same pest, a nematode that can not be distinguished under the microscope from the one carried by narcissus, and that if narcissus should be sterilized it would seem equally necessary to sterilize hyacinths. Acting on the theory, too, that huge quantities of importations carry danger of pest introduction it was suggested that perhaps tulips might be restricted also but in both of these cases there was a most violent objection on the part of the bulb growers. It is just a little bit difficult to understand how an imported narcissus bulb in a greenhouse in St. Louis, for example, where it is being forced for flowers could be more dangerous to the bulb cultures of the Northwest than hyacinths imported and grown along side the narcissus plantings in the Northwest, or how this bulb in the greenhouse in St. Louis could be more dangerous to the bulb cultures of the Northwest than a nematode-infested narcissus bulb from Michigan, North Carolina, Virginia or California. These inconsistencies are inherent in a quarantine which has the selective features that Quarantine 37 has and will always be prominent in such a quarantine.

It would seem that if there is anything in the theory that large volumes of importations of plants present a menace to the horticulture and agriculture of this country through the probability that they may carry pests, known or unknown, detectable or undetectable by inspection, it is of sufficient importance for Congress to take note of the situation and legislate accordingly. What the Department has done in Quarantine 37 is to assume in a large measure the functions and prerogatives of Congress in legislation. In so doing we are dragged into the trade field, the quarantines become subject to consideration in trade agreement negotiations and lose their scientific and biological aspects and become more or less purely commercial. In these circumstances it would seem fitting that Congress should declare it to be the policy of the United States that plants or plant products capable of propagation should be imported for propagation purposes only; that they should be imported and propagated under the surveillance of the Secretary of Agriculture for such time and under such conditions as the Secretary should prescribe. Such a policy is fully defensible from the scientific and biological aspects and is fair to everyone. Moreover it would be a better safeguard against the introduction of pests. Authority should still continue and undoubtedly would for the complete exclusion of plants and plant products capable of propagation as well as other articles known to be dangerous to this country. It would bring under inspection and surveillance plants which might be dangerous through the possibility of bringing in pests that are undetectable by inspection and pests or diseases that are now unknown.

As a matter of fact, Quarantine 37 has not been the howling success that many people imagine it has been in keeping pests out, as indicated by the fact that there has not been a year since the Plant Quarantine Act was passed in 1912 that there have not been recorded anywhere from two to fourteen pests theretofore unknown in the United States. Since 1912 there have been recorded one hundred and fifty-nine insects new to the country and seventy-five diseases new to the country. It is only fair to point out that no plant quarantine would have kept some of these pests out. For example, there has recently been found the white-fringed beetle in the southern part of the United States which seems to be unusually destructive to the crops of that part of the country. It is only known to exist in four other countries and little or nothing is known about it in those places. Our observations so far have failed to reveal the presence of any males, and these beetles while they are all females are perfectly capable of establishing an infestation since they lay fertile eggs which produce mature beetles without any males being present. While it is only circumstantial evidence, the evidence is at least sufficiently strong circumstantially to be almost conclusive that this pest was brought into the country in cargoes of bones to be used for fertilizer purposes. Another serious situation is the Dutch elm disease situation. This disease was brought in in elm logs for veneering purposes. It so happened that the logs were infested with a bark beetle and the logs also were carrying the Dutch elm disease thus enabling the beetles to leave the logs, feed on elm trees in this country and introduce and spread the disease. Unless adequate facilities are afforded for the eradication of this disease, there is no reason to believe that the elms will not follow the chestnut into extinction. We have found no method of eradication short of eliminating the diseased trees entirely, and experience and observations in foreign countries indicate that unless the disease is checked, the elms are doomed.

A careful check of plant importations under Quarantine 37 shows also that the quarantine has not reduced to the minimum the importation of plants. For instance under regulation 14, which is the special permit regulation, there have been imported on the average annually 11,576 rose plants and cuttings. If it is suggested that this amount might be increased there is a terrific protest; however, during the same time there has been an average annual importation of rose stocks amounting to 8,881,537. These come in unlimited as to quantity under inspection but, as is well known, they are not any more carefully guarded with respect to pests in their production abroad than are the variety roses.

With regard to bulbs, the average annual importation has been 205,629,970 for the ten-year period ending June 30, 1937. Under regulation 14, the special permit regulation, the average importation for the same period has been 7,471,312. If we suggest that more gladiolus might safely be imported under regulation 14, the same protest arises that always arises when there is any apparent relaxation of the quarantine, yet there is no protest whatsoever when more than 205,000,000 bulbs of other varieties are given unlimited importation as to quantity.

So that it seems time that the whole plant quarantine situation be ventilated; that these people who are sincerely interested in keeping pests out of the country and not necessarily interested primarily in exclusion of plants

for the purpose of eliminating competition, should work out and secure legislation which will be scientifically and biologically sound and which will allow the Department to defend its actions with regard to the quarantine and which will allow the Department to be fair to everyone. In such a situation it appeals to me that the garden clubs of America play a most vital part because, as I have pointed out before, it is my firm conviction that there has been no more powerful moving force in the development of horticulture than the garden clubs.

ooOoOoo

